



Story and photos by SrA. Jeff Capenos
Public affairs

As the mist crept over the quiet English countryside, a shadowy figure moved among the Pines. Stalking his target, the figure took up his position just a mere 150 meters out. Well hidden with camouflage, his steel blue eyes followed the target while his mind calculated the distance. Today’s mission was clear — not to engage the target, but rather collect intelligence. He laid there unnoticed for another 40 hours, watching and taking notes.

Then, just like the fog he silently slipped away without a trace and into history as the U.S. Air Force’s first qualified Royal Air Force Regiment sniper. This was the scenario for TSgt. Scott Ruecker, formerly assigned to the 48th Security Police Squadron, as he completed the RAF Regiment Field Sniper Course at RAF Honington Tuesday. Although the Air Force is the only U.S. military service that doesn’t use snipers as a part of its service, Ruecker said “having qualified snipers or at least sniper trained people on air base ground defense teams would be an effective tool, and I’m trying to pave the way for getting more Air Force people trained.

“Snipers are cost effective and valuable tools to any defense team,” Ruecker said. “Because of their observation, concealment and weapons training, a well trained sniper can go unnoticed, observe and engage targets that other forces can’t even see. Snipers can do a job that currently takes several men to do.” Qualifying as a sniper isn’t a simple process though. To become a sniper in England, troops must complete an intensive, seven-week course at Honington which is designed to meet the standards of the Royal Marines, the RAF Regiment and the British Army. “This is a difficult course to complete, said Flt. Lt. Tom Sawyer, officer commanding the sniper cell. “We demand levels of professionalism and achievement above that of a normal soldier. Students go through very uncomfortable situations here, so when they perform the job it’s comparatively easy.”

Ruecker, also a qualified Army Ranger, learned a myriad of skills during the course including camouflage and concealment; map, aerial photo and compass reading; distance judging; observation techniques; basic sniper knowledge and stalking techniques. He had to apply them all, which he said “wasn’t easy, because the game changes when people are looking for you.” For example, during the observation techniques portion of the course, he was shown 12 objects ranging from rifle magazines to web belts. Then instructors hid the objects in a field of trees and brush, from 10 to 150 meters away from Ruecker. His task was to spot and identify eight of the objects with the naked eye.

“The observation portion of the course helps snipers see what’s really going on around them,” Reucker explained. “When I look into the woods, I see through the woods and pick up on things, where you probably just see the scene. I pick up things that could be objectives or other aggressors.”

Another tough challenge Ruecker faced was the practical portion of camouflage and concealment or CAMOCON. This test pitted Ruecker against the instructors, when they gave him two minutes to run from a predetermined point into a field and conceal himself. Then they tried to spot him from the starting point.

If they couldn’t see him, then a “walker” would go out into the field and stand within 10 meters of Ruecker, and the instructors would look again. If they still couldn’t spot him, then Ruecker was allowed to simulate taking a single shot at the objective, in this case an instructor. If after the shot, the instructors still didn’t

see him, Reucker was asked about the particulars of his shot — what did he shoot at, the head or body? Based on that answer he would then have to give the correct distance to the target and the correct windage, to see if he hit the target and passed the test. “Putting what you learned to use was tough,” Ruecker said. “It was cold and rainy, and sometimes you were laying out there in a sheep pasture, perfectly still, for hours. It wasn’t always a pleasant. “But looking back, I think the course was great,” Ruecker said. “Sure, I feel a sense of self-accomplishment, but more importantly, I’ve learned a lot of valuable skills that I hope to share with others during air base ground defense instruction.” Ruecker returns to the 617th Regional Creek Defender Training Flight, Sembach AB, Germany, as an air base ground defense instructor.



TSgt. Scott Ruecker, the Air Force’s newest qualified sniper, peers through his scope at a target.

AFAF: Reaching out to those in need

By Becky Papp
“Jet 48” correspondent

Editor’s note: This is one example of the many ways that the Air Force Assistance Fund helps take care of Air Force families at RAF Lakenheath. To contribute to this year’s fund, contact your unit project officer or 2nd Lt. Evan Pitts at Ext. 5636.

Lisa Cantwell is a teenager taking driving lessons, worrying about getting car insurance, a job and celebrating passing all of her General Certificate of Secondary Education exams. She’s also a remarkable young woman who, along with her family, thanks the Air Force Aid Society for helping her to cope with cancer.

Lisa was diagnosed with acute lymphoastic leukemia in 1991 at age 11. At the time, her father, SSgt. Francis Cantwell of the 494th Fighter Squadron, was assigned to RAF Upper Heyford. Francis had to travel along with his wife, Jacqueline, and their younger daughter, Kira, to visit Lisa in the hospital during her initial four-month stay. As their savings depleted and Jacqueline quit work to care for Lisa, the Cantwells knew they needed some help. Francis’s first sergeant suggested he go to Air Force Aid.

“I don’t know what we would’ve done without their help,” said Jacqueline. A gas and food fund was set up by the AFA for the Cantwells to use as they needed it.

Assigned to RAF Lakenheath in 1992, Francis found his squadron to be very supportive. When Lisa was diagnosed as terminal, the Make a Wish Foundation sent the whole family on a trip to Walt



(From left) Lisa, Jacqueline, SSgt. Francis and Kira Cantwell.

Disney World in Florida. The squadron wanted make sure that Lisa had the best trip possible. The officers held a car wash and raised \$1,000 for the family.

In 1994, Lisa was once again in treatment and the family’s car broke down. The repairs were so costly that Francis thought he was going to have to take out a loan to buy another car. He went to AFA to ask if he could get a loan.

“They said, ‘We are here to help you, not add a burden,’ ” explained Francis. “They paid for the entire cost.”

The first time Lisa went into the hospital, she was told she wouldn’t live more than four weeks. Six years later, despite suffering relapses and times the family was not sure she would pull through, Lisa and her family appear undaunted and very close. Lisa takes a very active role in her treatment and lets the doctors know if she thinks something isn’t working.

Lisa participated as actively as possible from the beginning of her illness, with her family always by her side.

“The chemotherapy has to be adjusted from time to time to remain effective,” explains Jacqueline.

“The hospital food is limited and chemo changes your tastes. I would have to cook meals for Lisa and bring them to her so she would eat,” said Francis. Often, he would end up cooking for nurses and other patients in the children’s ward, as well.

Lisa is currently receiving treatment twice a month at Addenbrooke Hospital in Cambridge in addition to daily treatment she administers herself.

“It really has been a joint effort between Addenbrooke and Lakenheath,” said Francis.

With so much support from their community, family and friends, this close-knit family has coped with Lisa’s illness with exceptional courage.

“We decided to take each day as it comes. You have to make the most of any moments you have with your children,” said Jacqueline.

“I am happy to have the chance to say thank you,” said Francis. “Thank you to the hospital, the squadron and Air Force Aid.”

He also had the opportunity to speak on behalf of Air Force Aid at a recent wing staff meeting.

“I am terrified of public speaking. I had such butterflies in my stomach! But I felt I owed it to Air Force Aid to share my story.”

AFAF Unit Project Officers

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48th Aerospace Medicine Squadron
48th Medical Support Squadron
48th Dental Squadron
48th Medical Operations Squadron

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MSgt. Scott Giordano, Ext. 5904
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MSgt. Ray Vaughn, Ext. 3828
TSgt. David Faris, Ext. 3437
TSgt. Rodney Benberry, Ext. 5506
SSgt. Tim Johnson, Ext. 7083

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Training Detachment 16
18th Intelligence Squadron
5th Space Surveillance Squadron

TSgt. Emmanuel Alvertos, Ext. 3424
SSgt. Mark Busch, Ext. 7043
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